

Blog Summary of the Webinar – **Italy’s School Food Programs: Funding, Underlying Policy Mechanisms, and Implementation**

Description

As part of the Canadian Coalition for Healthy School Food series *School Food Around the World*, this webinar covered Italy’s School Food Program(s) - Linee Di Indirizzo Nazionale Per La Ristorazione Scolastica. The webinar included information on the development programs, including funding, policy mechanisms, implementation, and monitoring.

Participants

Hosts:

- Samantha Gambling – Provincial Coordinator for the Canadian Coalition for Healthy School Food
- Alessandra Manginelli – Post Doctoral Researcher at the HafenCity University of Hamburg

Panelists:

- Maurizio Mariani – Founder of Risteco, General Manager of Eating City
- Claudia Paltrinieri – President and Founder of The Foodinsider Association
- Antonio Ciappi – Cook, Gastronome & Director of Qualità e Servizi
- Francesca Rocchi – Delegate of Slow Food Italy & vice president of Foodinsider

Summary of Presentations

Part One: Maurizio Mariani (06:53)

- The objective of the European Union (EU) is to create a single market, including regulating the public procurement sector. However, not all member countries follow the guidelines.
- There is no specific school food program at the European Level. Currently, the only program they have is called School Schemes, a combination of two former programs concerned with increasing children’s consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, and milk.
- The School Scheme is a small program funded with approximately €250 million annually. Funds are used for procurement and education. Considering the EU has around 13 million pupils in primary school it works out to be only about €18 per student, per year.¹

¹ Also see:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme/school-scheme-explained_en;

https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme_en; and

https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme/country/italy_en

- School food programs (SFPs) are managed by the individual EU member states. Within Italy, they are managed regionally, and directed by cities.
- Public food service in Europe serves about 84 million meals per day (or 1 in 5 citizens).
- School Food for Change, the largest project for school canteens in Italy, is designed to foster education for students, teachers, parents, and other decision makers.²
- The EU's Farm to Fork Strategy is about fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food systems and addressing public health concerns.³
 - According to the World Health Organization (WHO), life expectancy is increasing but we are not living in good health. For example, public health expenses in Italy have doubled in the last 20 years, 2,500 EUR per person. This amount is typically spent in the last 10 years of life.

Part Two: Claudia Paltrinieri (16:05)

- Foodinsider is an association that monitors menu quality for school canteens according to the criteria set by WHO and the Green Public Procurement Law (Criteri Ambientali Minimi), an EU voluntary instrument made into law in Italy,⁴ intended to make school canteen food procurement more sustainable. Foodinsider ranks school food menus across Italy annually, and in 2021 they ran a poll on the quality of services interviewing mayors, counsellors, teachers, and parents. Their main goal is to use health and sustainability indicators to identify best practices and share them among regions and municipalities to promote health, sustainability, and innovation.
- History of Italy's school canteens:
 - 1911 – School education was regulated, and school canteens were established for students from low-income households.
 - 1977 – Full-time education was introduced in primary schools and school meals were considered necessary as part of the right to study.
 - Then, according to the law, school canteen service became guaranteed throughout the country and entrusted to the municipalities to run. However, school canteens were not considered an essential service, meaning the government did not finance them. Each municipality could offer the service free of charge but required a contribution.
 - Initially, canteens were managed with cooks and kitchens within the schools but in 2000 they started outsourcing to collective catering companies.
- School meals are regulated by the following organizations:
 - The Ministry of Health: create the guidelines that define how the menu should be designed.
 - The Ministry of Environment: help to shape the Green Public Procurement Law, which pushes school canteens to be more sustainable. For example, the law

² The authors could not find a website or article on the program *School Food for Change* online.

³ Also see: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/school-food-policy-country-factsheets>

⁴ <https://fsc.org/en/newsfeed/italy-approves-green-public-procurement-law>

requires at least 50% of food be organic and that washable dishes replace disposable ones, etc.

- The Ministry of Agriculture: allocate funds to reward the canteens that use at least 80% organic food.
- The Ministry of Education: define school canteen organizational guidelines and have implemented new regulations for Covid-19. They also regulate public contracts, including public catering service.
- Regional regulation can also play a role, usually through the financing of educational projects or the promotion of local or organic products. A successful example is Pappa-fish in the Marche region. It is a project to support local fish markets by increasing the consumption of fish in schools, and it also helps to reduce food waste.
- Costs range from € 2.20 – € 6.60. It depends on the type of program (i.e., the type of preparation – internal, outsourced, mixed, etc. – and the quality of ingredients), and on how much the municipality wants to co-finance the service.
- Successful examples of school canteens include,
 - Cremona region, they frequently rank at the top of the list.
 - Fano School Canteen in the Marche region ranked first this year.
 - Bio Scuola in Perugia uses 90% organic, local food.
 - In Caggiano parents provide produce from their gardens and payment varies based on their contribution.

Part Three: Antonio Ciappi (37:44)

- The outsourcing of school canteens to private enterprises has failed as they do not provide quality meals. Efforts are ongoing to reorganize and re-internalize the service.
- Qualità & Servizi is a completely public enterprise in the collective catering sector, and their focus is supplying meals for school canteens. They have 11 cooking centers and almost 200 staff members. They acquire 800 tons of food and serve 1.3 million meals annually.
- Qualità & Servizi's principles behind school food are agroecology and short food chains. They believe that public procurement can play a role in the protection of local gastronomic traditions and the environment, so their menus are based on territoriality and quality. They follow the three pillars of the slow food movement, which are good, clean, and fair.
 - Good - the quality of ingredients.
 - Clean - local food, short food chains, local farming, bio-agriculture, seasonal produce, minimal packaging, etc.
 - Fair - recognize the value that farmers provide and pay a fair price. Focus on procurement from small and medium producers rather than industrial operations.

- They produce 4 or 5 seasonal menus based on local ingredients and a Mediterranean diet. They also provide the carbon footprint of their products, diminish the use of meat products, and increase the use of legumes and other vegetable proteins.
- Much of their success is due to their recipes, they respect tradition but also look to the future. They are innovative with their recipes and use of technology.
- Special diets are accommodated for religious, cultural reasons, etc.
- They believe in investing in technology in their kitchens to improve efficiency and to maintain quality, as well as for recipe experimentation, taste testing, etc.
- Key statistics:
 - They pay 100% of salaries throughout the year (even when schools are closed).
 - 72% of food is from local producers.
 - 82% short food chain products (undefined).

Part Four: Francesca Rocchi (55:19)

- Slow Food Italia believes that learning by doing is the key to food education. A sense of community is the main pillar behind the project and the Orto in Condotta (Garden in Condotta) is the main tool for education of students, teachers, parents, and producers. The program engages 600 schools, more than 50,000 students, 20,000 parents and volunteers, and 2,000 teachers, in 200 cities in Italy.
- The founder, Carla Petrini, believes that food education is more than about nutrition. It is also important in establishing a deeper relationship with nature, culture, seasonality, and territorial biodiversity.
- School gardens are considered outdoor laboratories that help students understand and appreciate nature, plant cycles, and seasonality. They also help the children develop environmental awareness around things like natural resources and waste management and build important social and life skills.
- The biggest strength of the Orto in Condotta project (and vital to the slow food philosophy) is the community of learning it creates.
- The main challenges are the lack of time, funds, motivation, and continuity.
- Pensa che Mensa! (Dream a Canteen!) is an initiative to train the decision makers and operators of school canteens in responsible management. The initiative has created guidelines for school canteens and the program has now grown to include a Slow Food Europe Network.
- In 2011 the Slow Food Movement was involved with the launch of the EU-funded European Schools for Healthy Food project. This project's aim was to improve school canteens in 12 schools across 10 countries in Europe, through the shortening of food chains, use of seasonal, fresh, local produce, waste management, and integration of food education into their programs.
- The Slow Food Cooks' Alliance is another key project that advocates for biodiversity. They want to ensure that schools around the world develop their own practices with menus that respect the regional traditions, customs, and culture.

Part Five: Q&A Session - Key Takeaways

- The cost of school food programs varies. Some municipalities co-finance the program while others leave it to the families to cover the full amount. The cost for families also depends on income level, usually low-income families pay less or nothing at all.
- Funding does not come from the EU or from the federal government, however, there is some support from certain ministries and/or regional governments.
- Adherence to the nutritional guidelines from the Ministry of Health is voluntary, not mandatory.
- Sharing best practices and creating competition surrounding reputation has been an effective way to motivate and overcome bureaucratic hurdles and align different stakeholders.
- A committee or commission that represents the different ministries involved (health, agriculture, environment, and education) will help people communicate more clearly and efficiently. Parents, teachers, and cooks are also vital and should have a voice in the decision making, the most successful programs in Italy have included these stakeholders in the process.

For more resources and information on Italy's School Food Programs please follow the links below and see our Policy Document.

Eating City International Platform – Presentation Slides

<https://www.eatingcity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/M-MARIANI-Out-of-home-food-consumption.pdf>

Farm to Fork Strategy

https://ec.europa.eu/food/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf

European Commission “School Scheme”

https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme/school-scheme-explained_en

Foodinsider

<http://www.foodinsider.it/chi-siamo/foodinsider-in-english/>

Foodinsider - YouTube Video (Italian)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOKvnSCB1HU>

Qualità & Servizi

<http://www.qualitaeservizi.com/>

Slow Food Italia - Orto in Condotta

<https://www.slowfood.it/educazione/orto-in-condotta/>

Slow Food Italia - Pensa che Mensa

<https://www.slowfood.it/educazione/altri-progetti/pensa-che-mensa/>

Slow Food Cooks' Alliance

<https://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/en/what-we-do/slow-food-chefs-alliance/>

Slow Food - Education Manifesto

https://slowfood.com/filemanager/official_docs/SlowFood_Education_manifesto.pdf

Slow Food - Canteen Guidelines (Italian)

https://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021_linee_guida_mense_scolastiche_alleanza.pdf

Slow Food - Education kit for biodiversity

<https://www.slowfood.com/what-we-do/food-and-taste-education/the-ark-of-taste-goes-to-school-the-educational-kit-to-save-biodiversity/>

Slow Food - Education Handbook

https://slowfood.com/filemanager/Education/ENG_manuale.pdf